

Humble Requests both to Conformists and Dissenters,

Touching their

Temper and Behaviour

Towards each other upon the lately passed

INDULGENCE.

I. **T**Hat we do not over-magnifie our Differences, or count them greater than they truly are. I speak now of the proper Differences which the Rule it self makes, to which the one sort Conforms, the other Conforms not. Remember that there are differences on both parts, *among themselves*, incomparably greater than these, by which the one sort differs from the other. There are differences in Doctrinal Sentiments, that are much greater. How unconceivably greater is the difference between good men and bad! between being a *Lover* of the blessed God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and an *Enemy*! a real Subject of *Christ*, and of the *Devil*! have we not reason to apprehend there are of both these, on each side? Let us take heed of having our minds instr'd with a wrong notion of this matter, as if this Indulgence divided *England* into two *Christendoms*, or distinguish'd rather between *Christians* and *Mahometans*, as some mens *Cyclopick* fancies have an unlucky Art to represent things, creating ordinary men and things into Monsters, and prodigious Shapes at their own pleasure. It hath been an usual saying on both sides, That they were (in comparison) but little things we differ'd about, or circumstantial things. Let us not unsay it, or suffer an habit of mind to slide into us, that consists not with it. Tho'

one must not go against a judgment of Conscience in the least thing; yet let us not confound the true differences of things; but what are really lesser things let them go for such.

2. Let us hereupon carefully abstain from judging each others states God-ward upon these differences. For hereby we shall both contradict our common rule, and our selves. When men make Conscience of small and doubtful things, on the one hand, and the other, about which they differ, Blessed God! how little Conscience is made of the plainest and most important rule, not to judge one another for such differences? *Rom. 14. 3, 13.* Why of all the parts of that Holy Book is this Chapter only thought no part of Gods Word! or this Precept so variously enforc'd in this Chapter! and so awfully! verse 10, 11. *But why dost thou judge thy Brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy Brother? we shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.* Is it a light matter to usurp the Throne of Christ, the Judgment Seat of God? Yet how common hath it been to say, Such a one Conforms, he hath nothing of God in him? Such a one Conforms not, 'tis not Conscience but Humour? God forgive both! Had they blotted *Rom. 14.* out of their Bible? 'Tis plain by the whole
A Series

Series of discourse, 'tis the judging of mens states, and by such small matters of difference, that is the thing here forbidden. Otherwise that there is a lawful judging of others, who knows not? Some few things contain'd in this Chapter [*To receive one another, (i. e. as Christians, or as such whom God receives)* notwithstanding remaining doubts about such small matters, not determining such doubted things in Bar to the doubter. Verse 1, 2, 3. Or *not to lay stumbling blocks in each others way.* Verse 13. *Not to do the doubted thing, with a mind still unsatisfied,* verse 5. 23. Not to censure either him that does or forbears, not admitting an hard thought of him, or less favourable, than that *what such a one does, he does to the Lord, and what the other forbears, he forbears it to the Lord,* verse 6.] These two things I say, put in practice, had taken away all differences, (that we are now considering) or the inconvenience of them long ago. And we shall still need them as much as ever.

3. Let us not value our selves upon being on this or that side of the severing Line. 'Tis *Jewish, yea Pharisaical* to be conceited, and boast our selves upon externals, and small matters; especially if arbitrarily taken up, and is it self an argument of a light mind, and incomprehensive of true worth. Tho' I cannot sincerely be of this or that way, but I must think my self in the right, and others in the wrong that differ from me; yet I ought to consider, this is but a small, minute thing, a point, compared with the vast Orb of knowables, and of things needful, and that ought to be known. Perhaps divers that differ from me are men of greater, and more comprehensive minds, and have been more employ'd about greater matters; and many, in things of more importance, have much more of valuable and useful knowledge than I. Yea, and since these are not matters of Salvation we differ about, so that any, on either side, dare considerately say, He cannot be saved that is not, in these respects, of my mind and way, he may have more of sanctifying, saviour knowledge, more of solid goodness, more of grace and real sanctity than I. The course of his Thoughts and Studies having been by converse and other accidents led more off from these things; and perhaps, by a good Principle been more deeply engaged about higher matters; for no mans mind is able equally to consider all things fit to be considered, and greater things are of themselves more apt to beget holy and good impressions upon our Spirits, than the minuter and more circumstantial things (tho' relating to Religion) can be.

4. Let us not despise one another, for our differing in these lesser matters. This is too common, and most natural to that temper that offends against the foregoing caution. Little spirited Creatures valuing themselves for small matters, must consequently have them in contempt: that want what they count their own only excellency. He that hath nothing wherein he places worth, belonging to him, besides a Flaunting Peruke and a Lac'd Suit, must at all adventures think very meanly of one in a plain Garb. Where we are taught *not to judge,* we are forbidden to *despise,* or set at nought one another upon these little differences.

5. Nor let us wonder that we differ. Unto this we are too apt; *i. e.* To think it strange, (especially upon some arguing of the difference) that such a man should conform, or such a one not conform. There is some fault in this, but which proceeds from more faulty causes. Pride too often, and an opinion that we understand so well, that a wrong is done us, if our judgment be not made a standard and measure to another mans. And again, ignorance of humane nature, or inconsiderateness rather, how mysterious it is, and how little can be known of it: How secret and latent, little *Springs* there are, that move this Engine, *our own mind,* this way or that; and what *bars* which (perhaps he discerns not himself) may obstruct, and shut up towards us another mans. Have we not frequent instances in other common cases, how difficult it is to speak to another mans understanding. Speech is too penurious, not expressive enough. Frequently between men of sense, much more time is taken up in explaining each others notions, than in proving, or disproving them. Nature, and our present State, have, in some respects, left us open to God only, and made us inaccessible to one another. Why then should it be strange to me that I cannot convey my thought into anothers mind? 'Tis unchristian to censure (as before) Such a one hath not my conscience, therefore he hath no conscience at all; but it is also unreasonable and rude, to say, Such a one sees not with mine eyes, therefore he is stark blind. Besides, the real obscurity of the matter is not enough considered. I am very confident an impartial, and competent judge, upon the view of Books, later, and more ancient, upon such Subjects, would say, there are few Metaphysical questions disputed with more subtlety, than the controversies about Conformity, and Non-conformity. Blessed be God, that things necessary to the Salvation of Souls, & that are of *true necessity,* even to the peace and order of the Christian Church, are in comparison so very plain.

Moreover there is besides *bare understanding and judgment,* and divers from that heavenly gift which in the Scriptures is called grace, such a thing as gust and relish belonging to the mind of man, and I doubt not with all men, if they observe themselves, and which is as unaccountable, and as various, as the Relishes and Disgusts of sense. This they only wonder at, that either understand not themselves, or will consider no body but themselves. To bring it down to the present case. As to those parts of worship, which are of most frequent use in our Assemblies (whether Conforming, or Non conforming) *Prayer, and Preaching, and bearing of Gods Word:* Our differences about these cannot, but in part, arise from the diversity of this Principle, both on the one hand, and the other. *One sort* do more favour prayer by a foreknown form; *another* that which hath more of surprise, by a grateful variety of unexpected expressions. And it can neither be universally said, it is a *better judgment, or more grace,* that determines men the one way or the other, but somewhat in the temper of their minds distinct from both, which I know not how better to express than by *mental taste,* the acts whereof (as the objects are suitable or unsuitable)

ble) are relishing or disrelishing, liking or disliking. And which hath no more of Mystery in it, than that there is such a thing belonging to our natures as complacency, or displacency in reference to the objects of the mind. And this, in the kind of it, is as common to men, as humane nature, but as much diversity'd in individuals, as mens other inclinations are, that are most fixed, and least apt to admit of change. Now in the mentioned case, men cannot be said to be universally determined either way by their having a better judgment; for no sober man can be so little modest, as not to acknowledge, that there are *some* of each sentiments, that are *less judicious*, than *some* that are of the contrary sentiment, in this thing. And to say that to be more determined this way, or that, is the certain sign, or effect, of a greater measure of grace, and sanctity, were as great a violation both of Modesty and Charity. I have not met with any that have appear'd to live in more entire communion with God, in higher admiration of him, in a pleasanter sense of his Love, more humble fruitful lives on Earth, or in a more joyful expectation of eternal life, than some that have been wont with great delight publicly to worship God in the use of our common prayer; and others I have known as highly excelling in the same respects, that could by no means relish it, but have always counted it insipid and nauseous. The like may be said of relishing or disrelishing Sermons preached in a digested set of words, or with a more flowing freedom of Speech. It were endless and odious to vye either *better Judgments*, or *more pious inclinations*, that should universally determine men one way or the other, in these matters. And we are no more to wonder at these peculiarities in the temper of mens minds, than at mens different tastes of Meat and Drinks, much less to fall out with them that their minds and notions are not just formed as ours are; For we should remember they no more differ from us, than we do from them; and if we think we have the clearer light, 'tis like they also think they have clearer. And 'tis in vain to say, Who shall be judge? For every man will at length judge of his own notions for himself, and cannot help it; for no mans judgment (or relish) of things, which influences his Judgment, tho' he know it not, is at the command of his will; much less of another mans. Therefore,

6. Let us not be offended mutually with one another for our different choice of this or that way, wherein we find most of real advantage, and edification. Our greatest concern in this world, and which is common to us all, is the bettering of our Spirits, and preparing them for a better world. Let no man be displeased (especially of those who agree in all the substantial of the same holy Religion) that another uses the same Liberty, in choosing the way most conducing, in his experience, to his great end, that he himself also uses, expecting to do it without another mans offence.

7. But above all, let us with sincere minds, more earnestly endeavour the promoting the interest of Religion it self, of true reformed Christianity, than of this or that party. Let us long to see the Religion of

Christians become simple, primitive, agreeable to its lovely Original State, and again *it self*, and each in our own Stations contribute thereto all that we are able, Labouring that the internal principle of it may live and flourish in our own Souls, and be, to our utmost, diffus'd & spread unto other mens. And for its external, as the ducture of our Rule will guide us, so gradually to bend towards one common course, that there may at length, cease to be any divided parties at all.

In the mean time, while there are, let it be remembered that the difference lies among Christians, and Protestants, not between such and *Pagani*. Let us therefore carry it accordingly towards each others, and consider, our Assemblies are all Christian and Protestant Assemblies, differing in their administrations for the most part, not in the things prayed for, or deprecated, or taught, but in certain modes of expression. And differing really, and in the substance of things, less by meer Conformity, or Non-conformity to the publick rule of the Law, than many of them *that are under it* do from one another; and than divers that *are not under it*. For instance, go into one Congregation, *i. e.* a Conforming one, and you have the publick Prayers read in the desk, and afterwards a form of Prayer, perhaps, used by the Preacher in the Pulpit, of his own compofure, before he begins his Sermon. Go into another Congregation, and Prayer is perform'd without either sort of form, and perhaps the difference in this is not so great. It may be the Conformist uses no preconceived form of his own, and the Non-conformist may. Both instruct the people out of the same holy book of Gods word. But now suppose one of the former sort read the publick prayers gravely, with the appearance of great reverence, fervency, and pious devotion; and one of the latter sort that uses them not, does however pray for the same things, with judgment, and with like gravity and affection, and they both instruct their hearers fully, and profitably: Nothing is more evident, than that the worship in these two Assemblies doth much less considerably differ to a pious and judicious mind, than if in the latter, the prayers were also read, but carelessly, sleepily, or scenically, flauntingly, and with manifest irreverence, and the Sermon like the rest: Or than, if in the former, all the performance were inept, rude, or very offensively drowsy or sluggish.

Now let us *show our selves* men, and *manly Christians*, not swayed by trifles and little things, as Children, by this or that dress or mode, or form of our Religion, which may perhaps please some the more for its real indecency. But know, that if while we continue picquering about forms, the life be lost, and we come to bear the Character of that Church, *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*, we may ere long (after all the wonders God hath wrought for us) expect to hear of our Candlesticks being removed, and that our Sun shall go down at Noon-day.

The true, serious Spirit, and Power of Religion and Godliness, will act no man against his Conscience, or his rule understood; but will oblige him in all acts of worship (as well as of his whole conversation) to keep close to Gospel-prescription, so far as he can discern

cern it. And that, he will find, requires, that in subordination to the divine Glory, he seriously design the working out the Salvation of his own Soul, and take that course in order thereto, put himself under such a Ministry, and such a way of using Gods Ordinances, as he finds most profitable, and conducing to that great end, and that doth his Soul most real good. If you are religious, or of this or that mode or way of Religion, to serve a carnal design for your self, or your party, not to save your Soul, you commit the most detestable Sacrilege, alienate the most sacred thing in the World, *Religion*, from its true end; which will not only lose that end, but infer an heavy vengeance. Yea, and 'tis too possible to transgress dangerously by preferring that which is less, tho' never so confidently thought to be divine, before that which is greater, or separately from its true end. You greatly prevaricate, if you are more zealously intent to promote Independency than Christianity, Presbytery than Christianity, Prelacy than Christianity, as any of these are the Interest of a Party, and not being considered in subserviency to the Christian Interest, nor designed for promoting the Edification and Salvation of your own Soul. But that being your design, Living Religion will keep your Eye upon your end, and make you steady and constantly true to that; and to your Rule, without which you can never hope to reach your end.

Now hereupon, such as conform to the publick Establishment, and they that dissent from it, may differ from each other upon a twofold account. Either 1. As judging the contrary way to be simply unlawful: Or, 2. As judging it to be only less edifying. 'Tis not the business of this Paper to discuss, who herein judge aright, and who wrong; but supposing their judgment to remain as it is (which they themselves however should examine, and if it be wrong rectify) I shall say somewhat to each of these cases.

To the former, while your judgment continues as it is, 'tis true, you cannot join in worship with the contrary minded; but nothing forbids, but you can be kind, conversable, courteous towards them; and your common Christian Profession (besides the Rules of Humanity) oblige you so to be. Yea, and even to converse with them as occasion invites, more intimately as *Christians*, the visible marks of serious Christianity appearing in them.

To the latter sort it is acknowledg'd, you cannot constantly join in worship with those of the contrary way; because you ought ordinarily to worship God in that way which you judge to be best, and most agreeable to the divine Rule, (tho' you are not obliged utterly to abandon any for its imperfections or corruptions, that is not corrupt in the very essentials :) And that you ought most frequently to attend on that which you find to be most edifying to your own Soul. As that should be your more ordinary Diet that best agrees with you. And that way therefore you must most constantly adhere to, which is most grateful and savoury to you; because you cannot so much edify by what you less relish. But your judgment and latitude will well allow you sometimes to frequent the Assemblies with which you hold not constant Communion. And if it will allow, it will also direct you thereto for a valuable end; as that you may signify you ordinarily decline them not as no Christians, or their worship as no worship; but as more defective or less edifying; and that you may maintain love, and both express, and beget a disposition to nearer Union. And if our Rulers shall judge such intercourses conducing to so desirable an end, they may perhaps in due time think it reasonable to put things into that state that Ministers of both sorts may be capable of inviting one another occasionally to the brotherly Offices of mutual assistance in each others congregations. For which, and all things that tend to make us an happy people, we must wait upon him, in whose hands their hearts are.

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